Healthy Forests Report

December 2, 2005

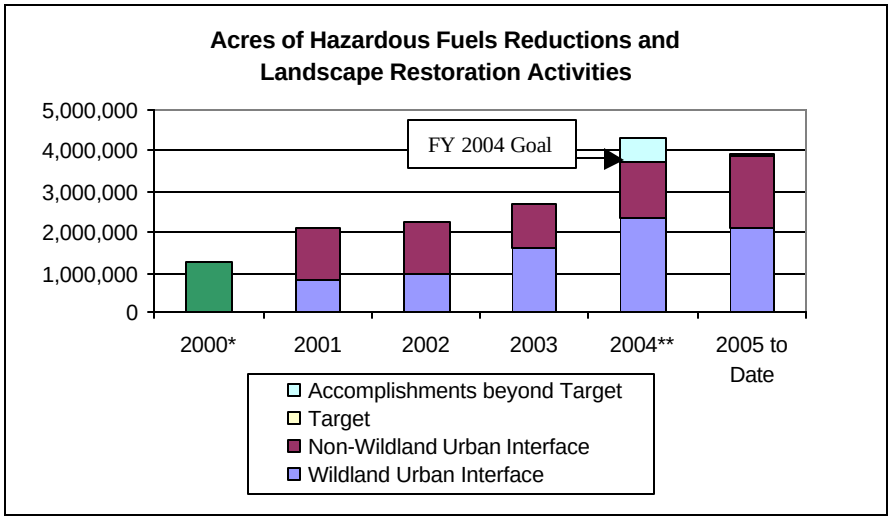
The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service are committed to the implementation of the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI). The NFP and HFI care for our forests and rangelands, reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to communities, help save the lives of firefighters and citizens, and protect critical natural resources.

HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION & CONDITION CLASS IMPROVEMENT

Hazardous levels of fuels in our forests and grasslands are the most significant risk factor of catastrophic wildland fires. Land managers are addressing this risk by reducing fuel build-ups with two approaches:

1. Hazardous Fuels Reductions are designed to reduce fuels around homes, communities and resources to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening these high-value areas.
2. Condition Class Improvement Activities are designed to reduce the likelihood of losses due to wildland fire by restoring wildlands to more historic conditions. (The condition classes (1, 2, & 3) describe an area's departure from historic conditions; risk of fire-caused losses increases for each higher numbered class, with little or no risk at the Class 1 level.)

Using the tools and authorities established under the Healthy Forests Initiative, the Federal land management agencies have treated over 15 million acres of federal lands since 2000. These treatments have contributed to the reduced threat of catastrophic wildland fire.



* FY 2000 is used as a baseline for reporting, as the NFP was implemented in FY 2001. Treatment location was not included in reporting prior to FY 2001.

** Acres treated under landscape restoration activities were not reported prior to FY 2004.

Table 1: Hazardous Fuels & Condition Class Improvement Activities, FY 2005 *(as of 11/18/2005)*

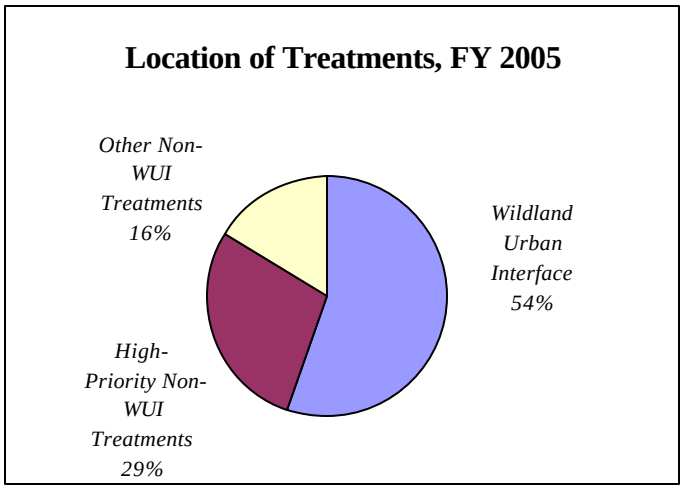
	Hazardous Fuels Appropriations		Other Appropriations (Condition Class Improvement Activities)		
Treatment Type	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**TOTAL**
Forest Service	1,366,988	305,921	114,313	593,164	**2,380,386**
DOI	820,575	448,828	60,977	289,808	**1,620,188**
TOTAL	**2,187,563**	**754,749**	**175,290**	**882,972**	**4,000,574**

Note: Total does not include approximately 251,000 acres treated by Wildland Fire Use on Forest Service Lands or approximately 62,300 acres treated with State Fire Assistance funding.

Hazardous Fuels and Condition Class Improvement Priorities

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's hazardous fuels reduction and condition class improvement activities are designed to meet one of three objectives:

1. Directly reduce wildfire threats to homes and communities that are adjacent to or within wildlands, in what is known as the *wildland urban interface* (WUI).
2. Treat areas outside of the wildland-urban interface (non-WUI) that are at greatest risk of catastrophic wildland fire. These *high priority non-WUI treatments* move towards restoring fire to its historical role.
3. Maintain previous treatments to ensure resiliency to catastrophic wildland fire and implement activities that are in line with other long-term management goals (e.g., wildlife management, watershed protection). These *other non-WUI treatments* are also outside of the wildland urban interface.



HEALTHY FORESTS AUTHORITIES

Implementation of activities under the HFI and HFRA authorities can be summarized as a three-step process:

1. NEPA Planning and Decisions – Activities that will require NEPA Decisions are identified (this generally occurs up to 3 years prior to actual project implementation). The planning is typically broad in scope, and may include multiple treatments.
2. Analysis and Preparation – Project preparation and design generally occur in the year prior to implementation. Project scope, location and treatment type are refined.
3. Treatment Planning and Accomplishment – Final planning and implementation occur.

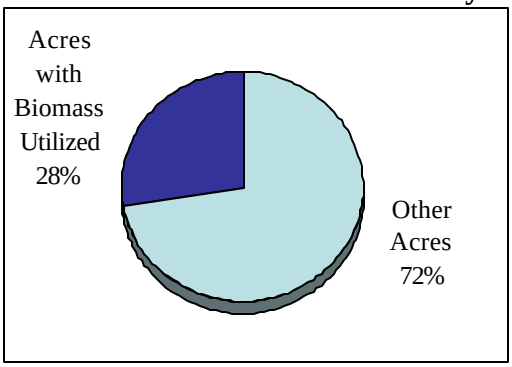
Table 2: Healthy Forests Activities, FY 2005 *(as of 11/04/2005)*

Treatments Planned	Treatments Completed	Acres Planned	Acres Completed
2,207	1,512	456,711	269,552

UTILIZATION OF FOREST BYPRODUCTS

Byproducts removed during hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities can often be utilized in certain forest products (e.g., timber, engineered lumber, paper and pulp, furniture) and bio-energy and bio-based products (e.g., plastics, ethanol, and diesel). To date, the Forest Service and DOI have treated 1,006,000 acres mechanically; of these, 28% have included biomass utilization.

Biomass Utilization from all Mechanically Treated Acres



STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS AWARDED

Stewardship contracting includes natural resource management activities that improve land conditions. These projects shift the focus of federal forest and rangeland management towards a desired future resource condition. They are also a means for federal agencies to contribute to the development of sustainable rural communities, maintain healthy forest ecosystems, and provide a continuing source of local income and employment.

Table 3: Stewardship Contracts & Agreements *(as of 10/05/05)*

	Bureau of Land Management		**Forest Service**	
2003	2 contracts	300 acres	50 contracts	14,000 acres
2004	22 contracts	15,000 acres	64 contracts	42,000 acres
2005	58 contracts awarded	15,000 acres	44 contracts awarded	35,500 acres
Total	**240 contracts / agreements for 121,800 acres***			

*Not all projects in table above were authorized under HFRA.

HFRA TITLE IV: APPLIED RESEARCH

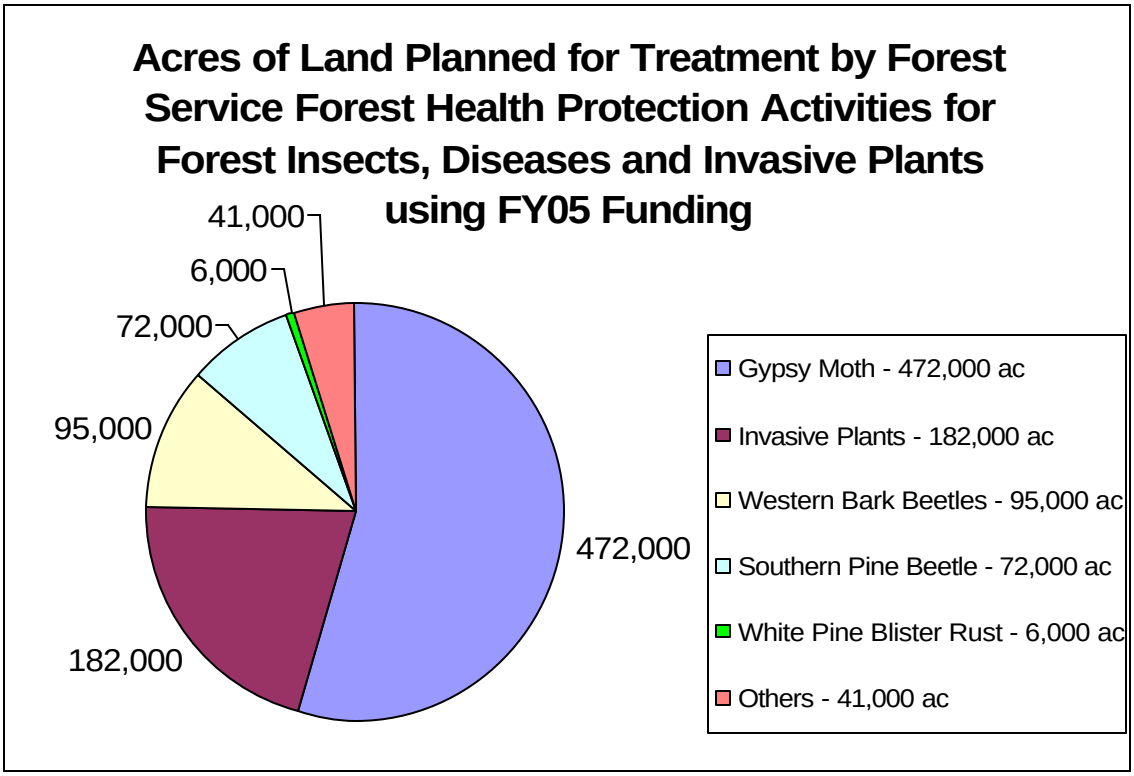
The Forest Service's applied research projects, in partnership with several universities and state forestry agencies, aim to conduct and evaluate different land management practices that reduce problems associated with the current outbreaks of insects and diseases and to translate that information for practicing professionals, landowners, and the public.

There are currently 6 Silvicultural Assessment and 6 Accelerated Information Gathering projects planned or underway. For more information of the Forest Service's Applied Research Projects under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, please visit:

http://www.healthyforests.gov/applied_research/index.html

INVASIVE SPECIES AND FOREST HEALTH

In FY 2005, Forest Service Forest Health Protection activities included both prevention and suppression efforts and provided resources to restore lands impacted by native and nonnative forest pests on federal, state and private lands. Some of the invasive pests addressed included: hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, sudden oak death, emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, Mediterranean pine engraver beetle, European wood wasp and invasive plants. Around 868,000 acres were to be treated as a result of Forest Health Protection efforts funded in FY05; data are still being compiled for the final tally.



The Forest Service *National Strategy and Implementation Plan for Invasive Species Management* (http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/publications/Invasive_Species.pdf) was released in late fall 2004. This publication identifies strategic direction for all Forest Service Programs relative to invasive species. Additionally the Forest Service "Invasive Species Program" website is now available at http://www.fs.fed.us/invasivespecies/ . The website serves as a comprehensive internal and external communication tool. Though various invasive species are being treated, the only data currently available regarding accomplishment are for gypsy moth where over 605,000 acres were treated. A total of 147,800 acres were multiple applications.

Some projects conducted for southern pine beetle and western bark beetles improve condition class. Over 85,000 acres for southern pine beetle and 41,000 acres for western bark beetles were proposed for thinning treatments on state, private, and National Forest lands. These treatments improve condition class. These projects were conducted using a combination of

funds provided in FY05 and previous years. To date, over 199,300 acres and 44,300 acres have been reported accomplished for southern pine beetle and western bark beetles respectively.

FOREST SERVICE USE OF THE ESA COUNTERPART REGULATIONS

Since May 2004, 288 Forest Service line officers, and 526 biologists have both taken training and been certified to use the new Endangered Species Act Counterpart Regulations. Through February 2005 over 50 National Fire Plan projects have used the Counterpart Regulations process and use has continued. A one-year evaluation of counterpart regulations use to date is ongoing, and results of that will be used to make any needed improvements in the use of this important tool.

HEALTHY FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

State forestry organizations continue to aggressively work with local government officials and local fire departments to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for communities that are at-risk from wildfire. These communities, which states and their partners collaboratively identify through a statewide assessment, are typically ranked as being at high, medium, or low risk from wildfire.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans provide counties and communities with a tremendous opportunity to influence where and how state and federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on surrounding lands. As well, the collaborative approach to preparing the plan ensures successful implementation and positive results. The CWPP guidebook has only been out since March 2004, yet many states have impressive accomplishments. For example:

NEVADA: Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF), using the USFS National Fire Plan funding, developed and implemented a community fuel reduction plan for an eastern Nevada rural community, Mt. Wilson. TheBureau of Land Management implemented a large scale project in the area surrounding the NDF project at the same time. The implementation of NDF's plan incorporated the latest agency recommendations to promote forest health. The project has been quite successful in both reducing fuels in and around the community, improving the health of the forest and improving biodiversity in the area. Fore the complete story, contact information and photo, please see: http://www.wflccenter.org/success_stories/48.php

COMING SOON: The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition will be preparing a review on Community Wildfire Protection Plans in the West. Jessica Call, Presidential Management Fellow for the Policy Analysis Staff of the Forest Service Washington Office is on staff in Denver for a month to focus on this task.

MONTANA: Of Montana's 56 counties, 39 (70%) are currently participating in Community Wildfire Protection Planning. Of those, 13 plans are completed, representing 117 communities. Another 26 will have plans completed by the end of 2007. When these plans are completed, roughly 46% of all of the communities in Montana will be included in a county-level CWPP. Of the forested counties, where there is the highest risk from wildfire and the most wildland-urban interface, the majority of them have completed CWPPs.

ARIZONA: Arizona has been very active in working with communities to develop CWPPs. They have identified 65 communities as "high risk". Of these, 56% have completed a CWPP. In addition, 33% of the "medium risk" communities in Arizona have completed plans. Plus, 35 additional communities have plans in draft form.

VIRGINIA: Before the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the Virginia Department of Forestry had been working with local communities to prepare "Woodland Home Pre-Suppression Plans". They are now busy updating those plans to meet the standards to qualify as CWPPs, as well as working with new communities. To date, Virginia has completed approximately 100 CWPPs, and expects to complete an additional 50 each year.

KENTUCKY: Kentucky's program is relatively new, but they are aggressively working with local communities to develop CWPPs. To date they have completed 5. Kentucky has adapted a template created by the state of Virginia, and plan to put it up on their website to increase its availability to communities. In addition, they are considering making it a requirement that a community must have a CWPP to qualify for a hazard mitigation grant under the National Fire Plan.

MINNESOTA: Using FY 2005 funding from the National Fire Plan, Minnesota is undertaking an initiative to assist communities in the development of CWPPS. The FIREWISE Minnesota project objective is to have the local wildfire protection planning based on the needs of the people involved to assure plan implementation will continue indefinitely. Minnesota DNR is utilizing an eight step approach to involve communities and their partners in the development of the CWPPs. Communities that have previously participated in the FIREWISE Minnesota are targeted in program implementation.

WISCONSIN: The Wisconsin DNR has undertaken a project in collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, US Forest Service and fire departments to map all communities at risk in the state of Wisconsin. The communities are identified according to the methodology identified in the Field Guidance memo prepared by the National Association of State Foresters. This project will take communities at risk to the next level – the community assessment and the creation of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Wisconsin is in a unique position in that all communities within the state must have a comprehensive plan in place by January 1, 2010 (per the Comprehensive Planning law enacted in 1999). The Community Wildfire Protection Plan is a natural extension of the Comprehensive Plan in parts of the state with high wildfire potential. In November, 2004, the Wisconsin DNR began working with the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to begin work on creating Community Wildfire Protection Plans for communities already listed in the federal register. The state is utilizing National Fire Plan funds to develop ten plans this year.

Maine: The Maine Forest Service has completed a Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Strategies Plan for the Carrabassett Valley in Western Maine. This community at risk covers an area of 77.2 square miles of private land and has a permanent population of 399. A large seasonal population visits the area for winter and summer recreational opportunities. The Maine Forest Service completed 125 structural and vegetative site assessments throughout the

valley in the preparation of the plan. The plan addresses structural ignitability, suppression capabilities and needs, rural water supply, community access issues and fuel hazard mitigation practices. The Maine WUI Communities at Risk Project has a goal to complete plans for 125 towns by 2008 and dedicates two employees to the project.

MISSISSIPPI: Fire mitigations projects in Hancock County Mississippi are even more critical in the wake of hurricane Katrina. In addition to the loss of lives, homes, and businesses, Hurricane Katrina left a tangled web of downed timber, which multiplied the volume of fuel available to burn. The "jackstrawed" timber makes it extremely difficult for fire fighters to move through the forest with tractor plow units, which is the primary tool used to fight fires in the south. The difficulty in maneuvering mechanized equipment makes the fire fighter's job extremely dangerous. Additionally, the storm surge pushed into Mississippi 10 to 12 miles. Salt water from the storm surge killed and cured practically all vegetation contacted, which greatly increased the fire hazard.

One of the hardest hit areas was Hancock County, which adjoins Louisiana on the Southwest Mississippi gulf coast. Hancock County had a rapidly increasing population and has traditionally had a high wildfire occurrence averaging over 300 fires per year. Hancock County is the site of one of the Hazard Mitigation Projects of the Mississippi Forestry Commission. Areas treated through this project will be better protected from wildfire than areas outside the project. To learn more about the Hancock Fire Mitigation Project, visit www.stateforesters.org and look in the NFP success stories for Mississippi.

More information on how HFI is helping communities, including a link to the "Community Wildfire Protection Plans: How-To Guide" can be found at: www.healthyforests.gov/community.